

Georgia Industries For The Blind

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In
America

April 2017



GEORGIA VOCATIONAL
REHABILITATION AGENCY

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GEORGIA VOCATIONAL
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GIB Hosts Successful Open House

Members of the Decatur County Community Were on Hand

On an unseasonably warm day in early March, Georgia Industries for the Blind opened their doors to local elected officials, public safety officers and other interested parties.

The event allowed the public to get a look into what goes on in the manufacturing facility, and it truly is the kind of facility that needs to be experienced in person.

For those who are unaware, GIB maintains a staff ratio of 75 percent blind or low vision employees who work specifically on the production line. That means at any given time on the plant floor, three-quarters of the staff operating the heavy machinery amidst the controlled chaos of a functioning manufacturing plant can't see the work they're doing.

As it stands, GIB now employs nearly 100 blind persons and generates its total administrative and operating budgets through the sales of its products, receiving zero dollars from state or federal means.

The fact that GIB is primarily an operation run by individuals who are blind hasn't stopped the facility from receiving the top safety rating for a facility of its type, going roughly six years without a lost-time accident.

"We're very proud of our track record on safety," said GIB Co-Director Mike Jackson. "We want to get the work done, and we want to get it done well and efficiently, but at the end of the day, we want to get it done safely."

People have come from all over the world to be a part of the GIB team, traveling as far as Haiti and South America to work at the plant. And the products produced there are as diverse as the individuals who work there.

Their entire catalogue can be viewed on their website (www.buygib.com), but their primary

sellers are pillows, safety vests and file folders.

Odds are, if you've traveled through Atlanta, you've seen some of their products, as all HERO interstate accident response units wear tear-away vests made exclusively by GIB.

In addition, their pillows can be found in area hospitals and nursing homes, with a special clear pillow made to help locate contraband at correctional facilities.

The plant also houses a call center for lead generation for GVRA, with staff working to find out what positions employers are hiring for and connecting those companies with clients.

"We do really appreciate what you all do here. I appreciate all of your participation," said Chairman of the Decatur County Board of Commissioners Pete Stephens.

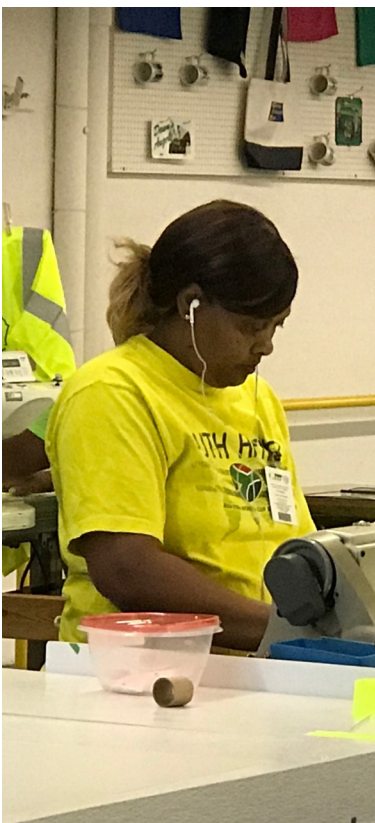
The tour of the facility—which lasted about half an hour—highlighted production processes, effectively showing how a pillow goes from being stuffing and cloth to well ... a pillow. The event was covered by a member of the local paper who later wrote a flattering piece on the facility.

On the whole, said Luis Narimatsu, Co-Director at the plant, the goal of the open house was to raise awareness about the kind of products GIB offers and in the end, drive sales.

"It's important that we do get our name out, so people can find out what we do, and we can make more sales," he said.

If the number of foam pillows that were sold that day is any indication, the event definitely accomplished that to which it set out.

Georgia Industries for the Blind recently hosted an open house for community members and local area leaders.



RWS CNA grad Leighanne Sivell checks the pulse of Iris Waller, a patient at Warm Springs Nursing Home.



Community Members Find Success at RWS

The CNA Program is Putting People to Work in Their Community

In 2008, Lynn Arndt helped form the Certified Nursing Assistant program at Roosevelt Warm Springs, and nine years later, it's one of the most successful certifications on campus. Just look at the numbers.

At the December commencement, nine of the 58 graduates were CNA students, and seven of those were employed at the time. By mid-February, the other two had found jobs as well, and it doesn't take a mathematician to calculate the success rate of that graduating class.

So where does the success come from? According to Lynn—as well as recent graduates—it's born out of the program's teaching methods, which are tailored to different learning styles.

“Hear it. See it. Do it until you're sick and tired of hearing it, seeing it and doing it,” she said. “We put the program together to hit on the different learning types. The audible. The hands on. The hearers, the seers, the doers.”

In addition to adapting the curriculum to different learning styles, the program also works to accommodate students with specific disabilities, and as a result, it has produced graduates with hearing loss and legal blindness who have gone out and succeeded in the workforce.

And the successes aren't limited to RWS students. Since its inception, the CNA program has been modeled towards inclusivity, allowing community members to take the 12-week class for \$500.

As it stands, most Registered Nursing programs require CNA certification for acceptance, so the class at RWS can be, for many, a stepping stone.

On a busy Monday morning at the Warm Springs Medical Center and Nursing Home,

which stands adjacent to the RWS campus but is not affiliated, three recent community graduates from the CNA program went about their duties. Making sure patients received their meals on time. Making sure they're turned on a schedule, and generally attending to their needs.

It was still relatively early in their 12-hour shift, and Chrystal Ivey, Shana Thomas and Leighanne Sivell were full of energy and eager to talk about how the skills they learned in the CNA program next door to their current employer served them well in their day-to-day duties.

“I wanted to further myself in the healthcare field, so I wanted to start at the lowest and work my way up,” Chrystal said. “I liked the hands-on that we got at Warm Springs. If we had a problem, they'd always help you. We didn't move on until everybody understood it and could do it.”

And the number of skills they had to master in order to pass the CNA certification test in order to obtain their license was substantial. On the whole, they had to be prepared to demonstrate a total of 22 different skills. From using a transfer belt to move a patient to counting a patient's radial pulse to dressing and feeding patients, the necessary skills were diverse and required an acute attention to detail.

Leighanne said that the rigorous testing in the CNA program prepared her for taking the actual certification test.

“They give you so many tests that when you have to take the state test, it's a breeze. It was just laid out perfect,” she said. “I was a nervous wreck my state test day, but then I saw it and I was like ‘Whoa. This is just what we learned.’”

FHF and Partners Hosts Pageant

Friends Helping Friends Turns Up the Bright Lights



The sixth annual Friends Helping Friends Club (FHF) Pageant & Silent Auction on March 18 was a huge success, raising over \$31,000.

The program began with a special welcome from State Representative Tom McCall, honoring his children Bud and Katie for their part in being the inspiration for and founding member, respectively of FHF. Gary Purvis offered the opening prayer and introduced former Elbert County Schools Superintendent Rick Higginbotham and retired teacher and coach Jeff Adams as the masters of ceremony.

Each of the 27 contestants was escorted and crowned by reigning Miss FHF Suzanne Goossens, reigning Mr. FHF Bryson Rucker, reigning Teen Miss FHF Kendra Turman and reigning Teen Mr. FHF Collin Peppers among others.

The pageant was open to any female or male with special needs between ages three to 29. Staff members assisted contestants during Friday evening's rehearsal and also during the pageant back stage, where formal wear, make-up and hair stylists were provided free of charge.

All contestants received a crown or tiara, congratulatory gift bag full of treats, a Friends

Helping Friends 2017 Beauty Pageant shirt and FHF Sponsorship Booklet.

Pageant coordinators Friends Helping Friends Club, Inc. President Sandy Adams and EC Schools FHF Sponsor Chrystal Thomas, expressed their sincere appreciation to everyone who helped provide this wonderful opportunity for Elbert County students.

"I am so proud of how our community supports and celebrates Elbert County students who are overcoming special challenges ... with a little help from their friends," Sandy said. "Because of friends like them, our students are given wonderful opportunities to participate fully in our community."

All FHF assistants are volunteers receiving no compensation. FHF services are provided at no cost to the school system. Tax deductible donations to FHF provide wonderful trips, special events, crafts and camps for Elbert County students overcoming special challenges.

Rising UGA softmore Mecole Hardman was in attendance and escorted several of the participants. Visit www.FriendsHelpingFriendsClub.com for more info about the Friends Helping Friends Club.

Sometimes It Takes a Few Tries

One Client's Success Story ... a Decade in the Making

Ten years ago a young man, just out of high school, came to GVRA with his mother. He said he wanted to be a cartoonist, and while this is a story that has a happy ending, the ending was a long time coming.

Today, Tyler Hughey works at Flash Graphics, a printing and graphic design firm in Dalton. While there, he helps out around the shop where he can and spends the rest of his day learning the printing trade. He wouldn't be there, he said, if it weren't for all the help he received along the way from GVRA staff, who helped him fully flesh out his skills and find a job that was the best fit.

But it didn't happen on the first try.

In 2007, at his VR counselor's urging, Tyler enrolled at Dalton State, taking general course load. While there, he decided to change his major into a certification in computer networking. But—as college students are wont to do—after attending school for two years he realized that college was not for him.

[Ed. Note: Tyler went through several counselors during his ten-year period on the case rolls at GVRA.]

Knowing that he wanted to be a chef, Tyler's counselor then suggested he become a kitchen helper—effectively a cross between a prep cook and general kitchen assistant. He was given a certified work adjustment training to help him learn the ins and outs of food preparation. Everything was going well at the Dalton Depot and Trackside Tavern where he was honing his skills ... until it wasn't.

His mother explained that his favorite horse had died, and as a result, Tyler was pretty depressed. In addition, Tyler was involved in the Winter Special Olympics at the time, and between his training and low mood, his heart just wasn't really in the job he was doing.

Shortly thereafter, Tyler quit working at the Depot. Another bump in the road. Yet, even after his counselor lost touch with him for awhile after this, the GVRA team assisting him didn't give up.

That's when Counselor Assistant Tammy Terry came in. She had recently received her certification in job coaching, and she was ready to put what she learned into practice. Working with other staff, she was able to get back in contact with him. Doing job discovery, they learned about an animation website he produces, and he shared with them his business card.

With this information, Tammy came to the conclusion that a job in the graphic printing or graphic arts field might be a good match.

After traveling with Tyler to Office Depot and other big-box printing operations, it became clear that this wouldn't be a great fit for him. She went to a small company and talked to the owner's assistant. So maybe a smaller, locally-owned shop would be a better fit.

Tammy sprang into action and reached out to Flash Graphics in Dalton. They brought Tyler in and showed him the different departments in the building, and he quickly fell in love with the place.

And he's been there ever since.

His job duties differ from day to day—everything from watching the printer for jams, to putting spirals into the booklets, to putting labels on folders for workshops. But whatever his job is for any give day, he said he's grateful for the staff at GVRA to help him make it reality ... albeit a decade in the making.

"I feel like going to GVRA was the best thing I could have done," he said. "I wouldn't have a job without everyone's help."

Shelley Kraft Promoted

The Transition Team is Being Filled Out

Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency announces Shelley Kraft as the Assistant Director of Transition. A seven-year employee of GVRA, Shelley received her Bachelor of Science Degree from East Carolina University in Recreation and Leisure Studies with a Concentration in Therapeutic Recreation in 1995. As a Certified Therapeutic Recreation Specialist, she supervised staff and activities of the Recreation Therapy Program at S.D. Allen Psychiatric Nursing Facility, a part of the Bryce Hospital System.

In 2009, Shelley decided on a new career path and enrolled in Fort Valley State University where she obtained her Master of Science Degree in Rehabilitation Counseling and Case Management and is a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC) and Licensed Professional Counselor. She began her career with Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (GVRA) in 2010 as an intern student and later

obtained the position of Counselor, serving a transition case load at the Bibb County School System. In 2014, Shelley became the Rehabilitation Unit Manager in Macon and more recently served as a Career Pathways Specialist with the Transition Services Unit.

GVRA Director of Transition Lauri Tuten said, "Shelley is a dedicated GVRA team member and a natural leader. Throughout her years of commitment and service to our clients, she has demonstrated an innovative mindset, and she has a gift when it comes to connecting with young clients preparing to transition from secondary education to the next steps in their career paths."

Shelley is happily married to Retired Air Force Major Joseph Kraft, and together, they have three sons.

Shelley assumed her new role 3/16/17.

BEP Vendor Opens New Site, Partnership

And an Upcoming ServSafe Training

Zach Thomas, blind vendor manager, recently opened a vending location at the Georgia Academy for the Blind (GAB) where students and faculty can buy drinks and snacks. But that's not all.

Through the BEP partnership with the school, the students can experience hands-on-training in operating a vending facility. Zach instructs a weekly class about the available opportunities the BEP has to offer the students. This training includes lessons on loading and repairing the machines as well as on the various coin and bill mechanisms of a vending machine. GAB featured this endeavor in the "Howe's Now Council of Schools for the Blind" in the Winter 2017 publication.

All of this came after the Transition Forum Team for the school reached out to GVRA, who then referred the team to BEP.

"It's a natural partnership," said BEP Director Charlie Garrett. "We want to reach kids at a younger age and let them know about what the BEP has to offer."

In other news, BEP Training Coordinator, Michele Cote will be conducting a ServSafe: Safe Food Handler class at Roosevelt Warm Springs (RWS) April 11 and 12 for students as part of their food class curriculum. This training is part of a joint effort for training and assessments between RWS and BEP.



“I really wanted to help other people. It was something that was a big goal of mine.” - Veteran and GVRA Client Daniel Olsen (pictured right)

It Takes a Village

Daniel Olsen was trying to get his horse Flash to step onto a tire, a step that was about three feet off the ground. But Flash was reluctant. He would lift his left leg a few inches then put it down again. He would pause, and then do the same with his right leg. Back and forth. Over and over, the red dust rising and settling. It was more than likely the horse had never done anything like that before, stepping from ground level to such a height. Flash was scared, the strange newness of the task proving to be too much in that moment.

As Daniel—who is the ranch manager—tells it, Flash came to Waypoint Ranch under circumstances that were not so different than his own. As a barrel racer, Flash had broken his leg, an accident that routinely seals an animal's fate. However, as fate is not always written, he was taken in at Waypoint Ranch where he recovered from his injury. That's the thing about trauma though.

While the body will heal, sometimes it takes the mind a bit longer, and that's why Daniel came to Waypoint Ranch.

From 2007 to 2011, Daniel served two combat tours in Iraq, the first for 15 months and the second for a year. While the service itself was hard, the transition back into civilian life was a challenge in and of itself.

"Afterwards it was hard just getting back into it. I really couldn't do it," Daniel said. "I was going through some hard times, and I really wasn't able to cope with things."

Like so many who see combat, Daniel experienced Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, an anxiety disorder that is born out of experiencing a traumatic event. Its symptoms take many forms, including disturbing thoughts, feelings or nightmares related to the event, these thoughts often monopolize a veteran's existence.

As a result of PTSD, Daniel had difficulty maintaining work. He'd find a job, but it wouldn't last. Holding and maintaining work

to Daniel was important. He'd imagined that he'd spend his entire career in the military and now that that was no longer an option. He was worried about how he would support his wife and twin girls, who are less than a year old.

There's a common saying: "it takes a village to raise a child," but the sentiment can be applied to much more than child rearing. Daniel had a team of experts working on his behalf, a team that included the Georgia Department of Labor's Theresa Choice, his GVRA Counselor Amber Wiggons and Lisa Christopher, a transition specialist with the provider Strategic Training and Employment Incorporated.

Working in conjunction with T.E.A.M. 26, GVRA's veterans outreach wing, this group went to work finding a place where he could succeed in spite of his condition, and it was a balancing act, said Stephanie Cirasa, owner of Waypoint Ranch.

"He started out in a place where he needed a job that met certain parameters," Stephanie said. "He couldn't work in an enclosed space. He really wanted to work outside. He didn't want to work around a lot of people. He wanted to work with animals. He couldn't have sudden loud noises because all of those things would trigger his PTSD symptoms."

The Peace at Home Project is a program at Waypoint Ranch that supports trauma therapy for veterans and at risk-youth.

Finding them was a perfect confluence of factors, Lisa Christopher said. It often takes this sort of creative thinking to find the right match for any given client. His entire team was set on giving him the training and skills he needed to return to the workforce.

"More importantly than simply preparing him for a job, the goal for Daniel was to help him get to a place where he wouldn't experience the symptoms of PTSD any longer." Stephanie said, because Waypoint isn't just a ranch. At

Waypoint, counselors and equine staff practice what is called Trauma-Focused Equine Assisted Psychotherapy (TF-EAP) and Accelerated Resolution Therapy (ART). Their aim isn't mitigating the issues that veterans are dealing with but rather eliminating their root-cause. In essence, they're in the business of remapping the brain.

From a structural perspective, the brain of a veteran suffering from PTSD is similar to that of a horse in that both are constantly assessing the environment around them for possible threats, always on high alert, focused on survival. Through the interaction with a horse, clients begin to relax, focusing their energies outside of themselves and getting beyond the cyclical thinking that can often enflame their symptoms. Having shared characteristics, horses and soldiers have a common ground to

work from.

Since starting at Waypoint in the fall of last year, Daniel has seen marked improvement. He's happier and fulfilled, and has a job that not only has helped him through some pretty dark times but it affords him the opportunity to help others, and at the end of the day, that's what really matters, Daniel said.

"I hope to stay here and see how this whole program progresses. I want to be a part of that. I want to be a part of helping others, so they don't have to go through the same stuff that I did."

Waypoint will have its grand opening in May. For more information on veteran's programs at Waypoint Ranch email info@peaceathomeproject.org.



Tom Wilson Honored

GVRS Board Member Receives National Recognition

GVRS Board Vice Chair, Tom Wilson was recently named the 2017 recipient of the National Rehabilitation Association's Lead On Award.

The award recognizes leadership in the field of vocational rehabilitation and dedication to the cause of helping individuals with disabilities.

"I am so pleased that Tom has been recognized with this very special award by the National Rehabilitation Association. I know of no individual who has provided more dedicated service on behalf of persons with disabilities and the professionals who work to assist them in achieving success," said GVRS Board Chairman Jimmy DeFoor. "Tom has shown his

support through serving in many capacities including President of the Georgia Rehabilitation Association Chapter, President of the National Rehabilitation Association, and Chair of the Board of NRA. He has and continues to work tirelessly to support and advocate for Legislation at both the State and National Levels. He continues to share his expertise through webinars and other training opportunities. We are very fortunate to have Tom as one of our GVRA Board Members."

Tom retired as manager of the Athens Unit, Vocational Rehabilitation Program for the Georgia Department of Labor.



Calendar of Events

April 11 — Atlanta Hawks Night Out for GVRA Employees
Philips Arena
7:30 p.m.

April 12 — GVRS Board Meeting
Augusta Marriot and Convention Center
2 10th Street
Augusta, GA 30901
2:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.

April 14 — Blind and Deaf Services Listening Session
Savannah Public Library Auditorium
2002 Bull Street
Savannah, GA 31401
10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. - Blind & Visually Impaired
1:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m. - Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing

April 17 — Blind and Deaf Services Listening Session
DOL Career Center
221 South Ashley Street
Valdosta, GA 31601
10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. - Blind & Visually Impaired
1:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m. - Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing

April 19 — Blind and Deaf Services Listening Session
Columbus Public Library, Synovus Room (Side A)
3000 Macon Road
Columbus, GA 31906
10:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. - Blind & Visually Impaired
1:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m. - Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing

April 20 — Blind and Deaf Services Listening Session
Goodwill of North Georgia
154 Hicks Drive SE
Rome, GA 30160
10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. - Blind & Visually Impaired
1:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m. - Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing

April 26 — Blind and Deaf Services Listening Session
River Edge Behavioral Health Center
175 Emory Highway
Macon, GA 31217
10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. - Blind & Visually Impaired
1:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m. - Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing

April 28 — Blind and Deaf Services Listening Session
DOL Career Center
150 Evelyn C. Neely Drive
Athens, GA 30601
10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. - Blind & Visually Impaired
1:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m. - Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing

GIB Award Winner

Written by GIB Co-Director Luis Narimatsu

Jeff Durham, who has been with Georgia Industries for the blind for 32 years, was recently the recipient of the Working Wonders Award from Georgia Enterprises for Prodcuts and Services

Jeff, a native of Donalsonville, was born with Macular Degeneration and has always been quite independent and a self-motivator, seldom yielding to the limitations of his blindness. For the past 14 years, Jeff has been operating the garnet machine at the Bainbridge plant.

This machine, a very unique piece of equipment, is used in the manufacturing of an assortment of pillows for military and commercial customers. It is used in the production of a number of detention, medical and disposable pillows that are sold through the State Use Program. Jeff's responsibilities on the garnet machine include the setup, operation, receiving and inspection of raw material, as well as maintaining a smooth product flow across the machine.

Dawn Womble, Bainbridge plant production manager said, "Jeff is like a conductor in an

orchestra. He makes sure everyone in the garnet room has supplies and keeps me informed about any issues they may be having; this is very important in order to keep the room running smoothly."

For Jeff, the responsibility of operating such a unique machine as well as the products he helps to manufacture makes him very proud. Jeff said, "It is good to know I am supporting the efforts of the military, State Use program and many other customers by producing a quality product".

Around the Bainbridge plant, Jeff has participated in various committees like, the Employees Pursuing Improvement Committee (EPIC), which has been instrumental in Creating a Quality Work Environment (QWE) initiative to meet employee satisfaction and create new opportunities for upward mobility for his peers.

Congratulations Jeff for your hard work and commitment to GIB.



Employment Services recently hosted several career fairs across the state to connect employers face-to-face with GVRA clients.



Employment Services Hits the Road

The Last Few Months have Seen a Groundswell of Career Fairs

Over the last few months, the Employment Services team has worked with local field office staff to put on a host of career fairs around the state of Georgia, all of which aim to give clients a face-to-face interview with potential employers.

The events were held in Norcross, at the World Congress Center in Atlanta

They allowed hundreds of clients the opportunity to meet dozens of employers, with many of those landing jobs.

It's important for clients to meet employers in person, said Segment Market Leader Bill Bulloch, because it allows them to fully show who they are and what they're capable of.

"It's crucial for clients to get face to face time. They do better because they get to sell themselves, and employers get to see and interact with the clients," Bill said. "You're putting a face with a resumé."

And these events didn't happen in a vacuum. They're a collaboration between Employment Services and the field staff, both working together for the greater good of the clients.

"This could not be pulled off if it weren't a concerted effort between the field offices pulling in the buy in of the counseling staff and the counseling support staff. There are counselors walking around making sure if somebody needs to be triaged, they can help them," said Employment Services Manager Michelle Mason. "It wasn't just Employment Services pulling this off. If you want to have an impact on putting people to work, you can't be working in silos."

James Hall, a hiring manager at Sam's Club said, "We want to find the best applicants we can and give them an opportunity to start their careers. The more qualified candidates

we can get, the better our company will be."

From an organizational standpoint, Employment Services exists to ensure that clients get jobs when they're work ready. It's really that simple. But it took awhile to get to this point. Previously, Business Development was separate from VR and as result only entered the process at the very end. Roughly around the beginning of the year, that changed. At that time, it was brought back under VR, and Employment Consultants began to get involved earlier in the VR process. That way, they could establish a stronger understanding of what skills the client has, and when it comes time to match them with an employer, they'll have already identified positions that line up with those skills.

"We're going to work with clients sooner to make sure their employment plan is complete, and this allows us to get a better idea of what kind of jobs they'll be qualified for," said Director of Employment Services Ken Hise. "When they reach the point that they're ready to work, that job will be waiting on them."



Featured Employer: Walgreens

This is the First of a Series on Our Employer Partners

Because employers are a major component of our success as an organization, it's important that we recognize those who have committed to hiring individuals with disabilities, effectively paving the way for other private and public organizations in developing best hiring practices.

This month, we're featuring Walgreens.

Over the last decade, they've worked to develop new opportunities to design facilities and training programs to further grow an inclusive workforce. This initiative kicked off in 2007 with the opening of a processing facility in Anderson, S.C.—a warehouse across the state line that still employs GVRA clients to this day, maintaining an inclusive workforce where roughly half of its employees are individuals with disabilities. Former VR Counselor and Georgia Vocational Services

Board Member Angela Mackey was a main driving force behind this initiative. It was, initially, a bit of a learning curve for managers and team members who had never worked with such individuals before. But it didn't take long for them to come around, she said.

"Early on there may have been doubts but after you hire that first person, they realize that those people can do the same job," she said. "It's just about education."

Since then, Walgreens has opened up a similar facility in Pendergrass that features a similar hiring ratio as the facility in Anderson, and to this day, they remain a strong advocate for individuals with disabilities and a large employer of GVRA clients.

"It's a win-win for everybody," Angela said.



Katie Dempsey

This Month We Feature Rep. Katie Dempsey



Committee; the Health and Human Services Committee; the Higher Education Committee; the Rules Committee and the Transportation Committee.

In 2011, Katie served as Chief Deputy Whip of the House. In addition to her House leadership positions, Katie serves by appointment of the Speaker of the House on the Coosa North Georgia Water Planning Council, Regional Transportation Roundtable, the Department of Behavioral Health & Developmental Disabilities Coordinating Council, Recreational Authorities Overview Committee, and the Anatomical Gifts Procedures Advisory Board.

Previously, Katie served on the Special House and Senate Joint Committee on Immigration Reform, the House Study Committee for Pain Management and the Hospital Tax and Indigent Care Study Committee.

She graduated from the Georgia Legislative Leadership Institute and Emerging Political Leaders Program at Darden School of Business Coverdell Leadership Institute.

Katie Dempsey was elected in November 2006 to represent Georgia House District 13, which includes the city of Rome and additional precincts in Floyd County.

Over the last eight years, Katie has taken on a number of leadership roles, including currently serving as Chairman of the Appropriations Human Resources Sub-Committee.

Katie also serves on the Economic Development & Tourism Committee; the Energy, Utilities & Telecommunications

Katie also works with regional and national leadership organizations, serving on the Southern Legislative Conference's Economic Development, Transportation & Cultural Affairs Committee and on the National Conference of State Legislators' Education Committee.

Prior to her service in the State House, Katie served two terms on the Rome City Commission serving in a number of capacities, including Chairman of the Community Development Committee.

From her position on the city Commission,

Katie gained statewide notoriety for her leadership on municipal issues.

She served as statewide co-chair of the Joint Workgroup on Economic Development for the Georgia Municipal Association, the Association of County Commissioners of Georgia, and the Georgia Economic Developers Association, and was an active member in the National League of Cities.

She was also appointed to the Governor's Task Force on Local Transportation, helping improve roadways in Rome and around the state.

Katie's elected service is only part of the way she has served her community.

Katie has served on the boards of numerous organizations including the Exchange Club Family Resource Center, as a trustee of the Floyd Medical Center, and as President of the Floyd Healthcare Foundation.

She is active in the Greater Rome Chamber of Commerce, the Rome Symphony Orchestra, the Rome Junior Service League, and an alumna of Leadership Rome.

She is an active member of First United Methodist Church of Rome and a member of the Northwest Georgia Emmaus Community.

In 1990, Katie was named Child Advocate of the Year by the Rome/Floyd County Commission on Children and Youth. In 1995, Katie was named a recipient of the Heart of the Community Award.

In 2003, the Exchange Club named its community volunteer award after her and made her the first recipient of the Katie Dempsey Star Volunteer Award.

Katie is married to Lynn Dempsey, a native of Rome, and the couple has lived in Rome since 1974.

Since graduating from the University of Georgia with a degree in Early Childhood Education, Katie has helped run two successful small businesses in our community.

The Dempsey's daughter, Corie, and her husband, Andrew Swan, are the parents of their daughter Taylor and their son Patterson. Gaines, the Dempsey's son, and his wife, Amy, are the parents of their daughters Cade, Callie, and Eloise.

DAS Employee of the Month

This Nomination was Written by Lisa Swindler

For employee of the month, I nominate Britney LaGuins. Ms. LaGuins has been an integral part of the mega Unit 60 since its inception 5 years ago. Britney currently serves as the unit vendor specialist, the unit eCAT expert, and for a many years the unit social coordinator. Wearing all these hats might seem daunting but Britney does all of this with ease. All while maintaining a successful caseload.

Mrs. LaGuins has mentored new associates providing training and helpful hints on case processing. Over the past year Britney has worked with the eCAT adult CDR pilot committee. She assisted the committee from

development to determination of adult CDR's in eCAT. After the unit was recently trained on Adult CDR's eCAT, unit members continued to have a number of questions.

Without hesitation, Britney volunteered to conduct a mini workshop for the group. She provided actual case examples and demonstrated various tips we could apply to successfully process eCAT CDR's.

We were all appreciative of her efforts and truly grateful that she is a member of Unit 60. Thank you, Britney, for being the ultimate team player.

CSAVR in Washington, D.C.



(Above) Director of WIOA, Compliance and Policy Crystal Perry prepares to present at CSAVR. (Below) Deputy Executive Director Kevin Harris and Executive Director Sean Casey head to a meeting on Capitol Hill.

GVRA Leadership traveled to Washington D.C. for the bi-annual Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation Conference.

Director of WIOA, Compliance and Policy Crystal Perry presented on issues related to individuals with significant and intellectual disabilities. The audience included the VR attorney network and hearing officers from across the country. The emphasis of the presentation was the implementation of Section 511, limitations of subminimum wage. She also addressed issues specific to individuals with intellectual disabilities, such as guardianship and informed choice.

Adia Brown, Program Initiatives Manager, presented on Social Security reimbursement.



Legislative Wrap-Up

That's It on This Year's Session

March 30th marked the last day of the 2017-2018 legislative session. Both chambers were adjourned close to 1:00 a.m. on March 31st. However, the end of the legislative session does not mark the end of the legislative process. Bills passed by the General Assembly now require the Governor's signature before they can become a part of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, our state's body of law. The Governor now has 40 days to decide what legislation he will sign or veto. After that point, any bill left unsigned will automatically become law. The legislation below is now awaiting the Governor's signature.

House Bill 44 contains the budget for the State Fiscal Year beginning July 1, 2017 and ending on June 30, 2018. In this bill GVRA received an additional \$1,428,999 compared to the previous year's budget. Included in this budget is a 2% pay raise for all state employees effective July 1, 2017, and an increased allocation for Inclusive Postsecondary Programs and the Vocational Rehabilitation program. With GVRA's 4:1 Federal match, this could translate into roughly \$5.2 million in additional funding for GVRA.

Senate Bill 201, sponsored by Sen. Butch Miller of Gainesville, allows employees who work over 30 hours a week for private companies (with more than 25 employees) or who work for the State of Georgia to use up to 5 days of their earned sick leave in a calendar year to care for their immediate family members. This applies to parents, grandparents, spouses, children, and any other dependents.

Senate Bill 206, sponsored by Sen. P.K. Martin IV of Lawrenceville, the "Hearing Aid Coverage for Children Act", requires insurance plans for companies of over 10 employees to cover children's hearing aids. Under current law while Georgia's children are required to receive a hearing screening as

part of newborn screenings, employers are not obligated to pay for hearing aids, hearing aid maintenance, or hearing aid installation if a child is found to have partial or total hearing loss. If signed, this law mandates that health plans would have to cover the up to \$3,000 per hearing impaired ear every 48 months for individuals under age 18. This mandate would go into effect on January 1st, 2018.

Senate Bill 41, sponsored by Sen. Renee Unterman of Buford, requires all durable medical equipment suppliers to be licensed through the Georgia Board of Pharmacy. This bill was passed as a protective measure for those using medical equipment to eliminate fraud and ensure all durable medical equipment supplies are in compliance with state health and safety regulations.

House Bill 343, sponsored by Rep. Scott Hilton of Peachtree Corners and Sen. Blake Tillery of Vidalia, passed out of both chambers. If signed by the governor it will replace the terms "mental retardation" and "mentally retarded" from Georgia's criminal procedure, replacing it with "with intellectual disability".

House Bill 280, the revival of last year's vetoed Campus Carry legislation, was passed out of both chambers after adding several exemptions in conference committee. The bill, which now awaits the Governor's signature, would allow anyone over 21 years of age who has a concealed carry permit to carry firearms on any public postsecondary campus. However, the bill includes several exemptions. Individuals may not carry a firearm in any student housing facility including sorority and fraternity housing, in any preschool or childcare facility located on campus, in any room being used for college and career academy training, and in any space being used for classes in which high school students are enrolled. Individuals may not carry at any athletic events and in any faculty offices or

areas where disciplinary hearings are held.

The final House and Senate compromise of Senate Bill 16, sponsored by Sen. Ben Watson of Savannah and dealing with the use of medical cannabis oil, passed out of both Chambers. This bill allows an individual to possess up to 20 fluid ounces of low THC oil as prescribed by a physician if they are registered with the Georgia Department of Public Health and have their Department of Public Health issued registration card. Eligibility for this registry is currently limited to those who have been diagnosed with one of eight conditions including cancer, amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, seizure disorders (due to epilepsy or trauma related head injuries), multiple sclerosis, Crohn's disease, mitochondrial disease, Parkinson's disease, or sickle cell disease. Pulling language from HB 65 sponsored by Rep. Allen Peake of Macon, if this bill passes it will add an additional six eligible conditions including severe cases of Tourette's syndrome, Autism Spectrum Disorder for patients who are over 18 years of age or have in severe cases for individuals under age 18, Epidermolysis bullosa (a rare skin disease), severe or end

state Alzheimer's disease, severe or end stage Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome, and severe or end stage peripheral neuropathy. Unlike the original draft of this bill, lawmakers did not change the definition of "low THC oil", enabling doctors to continue prescribing up to 5% THC to their patients.

Senate Bill 108, sponsored by Sen. Larry Walker III of Perry, established a women's veterans office as part of the Georgia Veterans Administration to increase outreach to female veteran to improve awareness of their eligibility to state and federal veteran services and benefits, as well as to conduct a needs assessment in the area of services provided to female veterans. Another military bill, House Bill 322 sponsored by Rep. Bill Hitchens of Rincon, enables veterans who served through August 1, 1990 to be eligible for admission into the State War Veteran's Home.

Look out for updates as the Governor takes action. Please reach out to me if you have any legislative questions.

Katie Womick, Chief External Affairs Officer
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When the Rubber Meets the Road

Written by Communications Manager John Peyton Boan

Deputy Executive Director Kevin Harris is known for saying that we at the administrative level exist to support and assist the field. That's what we're here for. That's our mission.

Local office staff are the ones who have face-to-face interactions with the clients. They're the ones who know clients best, and they're the ones who recognize the skills those clients have and work to ensure they're ready to find a job when the opportunity arises.

It's important to remember that even if our job duties don't require regular contact with clients, we're all a part of their successes.

As always, let me know if there's ever anything I can do to help you, let me know, and if there's anything you'd like to see in upcoming newsletters, I welcome the feedback.

JPB

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